DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 187 UD 034 008

AUTHOR Melaville, Atelia
TITLE City Voices, Children's Needs: New Ways of Taking Action.
INSTITUTION National League of Cities, Washington, DC. Inst. for Youth, Education, and Families.
ISBN ISBN-1-886152-74-8
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 35p.
AVAILABLE FROM Center for Public Affairs, National League of Cities, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20004-1763. Tel: 202-626-3000; Web site: http://www.nlc.org.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Child Development; *Child Safety; *City Government; Cooperative Planning; Day Care; Diversity (Student); Early Childhood Education; Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Problems; Health Insurance; Housing; Municipalities; Racial Bias; *School Community Relationship; Underemployment; Violence; Wages; Youth Programs

ABSTRACT

This publication summarizes challenges and emerging issues that cities face as they respond to the needs of children and families. Data come from in-depth interviews with officials from 28 cities that participate in the National League of Cities' Municipalities in Transition Project, a high-level research effort drawing on information and experiences from a diverse group of cities nationwide. Interviews focused on: critical issues and challenges related to young people and their families; underlying factors that brought these issues to the fore; how the city is responding; what is working; what is making work harder; and in what areas the city would do more if it had appropriate knowledge and resources. Key findings include: cities are redefining their relationships with schools to help address concerns about school improvement and academic achievement; city leaders are worried about violence by and against youth, and they see greater investment in positive youth development as an important way to reduce violence; the effects of underemployment and lagging wages experienced by low-skilled workers in the new economy are intensifying problems facing children and families; and most cities are highly involved in collaborative strategies to address child and family issues. (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

Institute for Youth,
Education, and Families

ED 450 187

City Voices, Children's Needs

New Ways of Taking Action

UD034008

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M. Davis
National League of Cities
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2

About the National League of Cities

The mission of the National League of Cities (NLC) is to strengthen and promote cities as centers of opportunity, leadership, and governance.

NLC was established in 1924 by and for the reform-minded state municipal leagues. It now represents 49 state leagues, more than 1,500 cities and towns of all sizes and, through the membership of the state municipal leagues, more than 18,000 municipalities in total. It is the largest and oldest national organization representing cities and the only one that includes both mayors and council members as active participants.

NLC serves as an advocate for its members in Washington in the legislative, administrative, and judicial processes that affect them; develops and pursues a national municipal policy that meets the present and future needs of our nation's cities and the people who live in them; offers training, technical assistance, and information to municipal officials to help them improve the quality of local government in our urban nation; and undertakes research and analysis on topics and issues of importance to the nation's cities.

For more information on NLC programs and services, contact:

Center for Public Affairs
National League of Cities
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004-1763
Phone: (202) 626-3000

City Voices, Children's Needs

New Ways of Taking Action

© 2000
National League of Cities
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004-1763
(202) 626-3000
www.nlc.org

ISBN 1-886152-74-8

Table of Contents

Preface i
Acknowledgments iii
Participating Cities iv
I. Overview 1
Municipalities in Transition Project Background 1
City Voices, Children's Needs: Key Findings 2
II. Connecting Schools and Communities 3
Responding to Standards-Based School Reform 3
Mobility and Diversity 4
Community-School Partnerships 5
III. Ensuring Safety and Promoting Positive Youth Development 7
IV. The Impact of Shifts to A New Economy 11
Wage Disparities 11
Unemployment and Underemployment 11
Moving from Welfare to Work 12
Finding Affordable Housing 13
Declining Health Insurance Coverage 14
Finding Child Care 14
V. Searching For New Ways: Community-Wide Collaborations 17
Key Ingredients for Successful Community-Based Collaborations 17
Potential Obstacles to Progress 19
The High Cost of Taking Initiatives to Scale 20
Tips From City Officials 22
VI. Conclusion 23
New Ways: Multiple Roles for City Leaders 23
Meeting a Growing Challenge 24
End Notes 25

Preface

As the first publication of NLC's new Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, this report offers a portrait of the present and a glimpse of the future. Based on in-depth interviews with officials from 28 cities, *City Voices, Children's Needs: New Ways of Taking Action* summarizes the current challenges and emerging issues that these cities face as they respond to the needs of children and families.

The key findings from these interviews underscore how much and how quickly our cities and their families are changing. They also remind us that many of today's challenges will be met only through strong municipal leadership and new partnerships or collaborations within our communities.

The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families was launched late last year to strengthen the capacity of municipal leaders to enhance the lives of youth and families, using partnerships and collaboration to promote measurable improvements in youth, education, and family outcomes. Mayors and council members understand that the health of America's cities and towns is intricately linked to the well-being and vitality of the nation's youth and families. Municipal officials also are in a unique position to establish, support, or influence a broad range of key programs and policies for children, youth, and families, and they can bring diverse partners to the table in order to enhance the prospects for success. The Institute is designed to provide the support and assistance that mayors and council members need to be effective in these efforts.

City Voices, Children's Needs itself is the product of a collaboration. The interviews were conducted in cities that participate in NLC's Municipalities in Transition Project, a high-level research effort drawing on information and experiences from a diverse group of cities across the United States. The 30 participating cities were selected to provide variety in three key areas: income levels, employment growth, and city fiscal conditions, as well as in combinations of these factors.

Through the Project, NLC is working to explore economic, demographic, and legislative forces that are fundamentally changing the environment in which municipal governments operate. Without the infrastructure and support available to the Institute through the Municipalities in Transition Project, the research upon which this report is based would have been far more difficult.

The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families will publish a series of resource materials during the coming year to guide municipal leaders in areas of:

- Education
- Youth development
- Early childhood development
- The safety of children and youth
- Family economic security

The Institute also will provide technical assistance to mayors, council members, and other city officials as they work to meet the needs of children, youth, and families in their communities. We encourage municipal leaders throughout the nation to contact us whenever we might be of assistance in helping them respond to the challenges of today and the emerging issues of tomorrow.

Donald J. Borut
Executive Director
National League of Cities

Clifford M. Johnson, Executive Director
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
National League of Cities

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Acknowledgments

A collaborative effort produced this report.

John E. Kyle, program director, NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, developed the concept of using diverse cities in the Municipalities in Transition Project as the base for a unique and in-depth effort to learn about the work of cities addressing the needs of children and families. He then managed the ensuing project to accomplish the task.

John worked with Bill Barnes and Emily Stern of NLC's research staff to gain municipal participation and to develop an effective interview protocol. He secured the active involvement of three independent consultants - Atelia Melaville, Bruce Swinehart, and William H. Woodwell - to carry out and report on about ten interviews each. Through their combined diligence and effectiveness, they accomplished these tasks.

Atelia Melaville was the lead writer for this report of findings that encompasses all 29 interviews. Rafiq Abdus-Sabur and Lauren Grover checked facts for the brief city stories that amplify the text. William H. Woodwell provided editorial services. Wesley Blickenstaff designed the cover. Susan Mertz and Camille Kellogg of NLC's Center for Public Affairs provided design, layout, and editing assistance. Cliff Johnson provided overall editorial and strategic guidance.

Twenty-nine individuals gave us their time for interviews. These interviews are the backbone of the report, and we appreciate the assistance we received from these municipal officials. We also applaud the efforts that many of these cities are making to ensure positive futures for the children, youth, and families in their communities.

Cities Participating in the Project

Abilene, Tex.	Madison, Wis.
Alexandria, Va.	Minneapolis, Minn.
Boston, Mass.	Monroe, Mich.
Cerritos, Calif.	New Haven, Conn.
Charlotte, N.C.	North Miami, Fla.
Columbus, Ohio	Orlando, Fla.
Denver, Colo.	Philadelphia, Pa.
Detroit, Mich.	Rochester, N.Y.
Eugene, Ore.	Salt Lake City, Utah
Fort Wayne, Ind.	Savannah, Ga.
Galveston, Tex.	Seattle, Wash.
Great Falls, Mont.	Tempe, Ariz.
Iowa City, Iowa	Tulsa, Okla.
Little Rock, Ariz.	Watertown, S.D.
Los Angeles, Calif.	Yonkers, N.Y.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

I. Overview

City officials are concerned about the quality of education in their communities, violence by and against young people, and inadequate opportunities for positive youth development, particularly during nonschool hours. They believe that these and other problems facing children, youth, and families are exacerbated by growing wage disparities, poverty, and long-standing patterns of racism and economic segregation. While city officials often understand that comprehensive collaborative efforts are needed to meet these challenges, many report that their cities have inadequate capacity to lead or even to participate effectively in such efforts, and they acknowledge that they need to do more.

These are the principal conclusions of the National League of Cities' latest effort to explore some of the changes affecting American cities at the dawn of the 21st century - this time with a focus on changes affecting children, youth, and families. In individual conversations with 29 officials in 28 cities in late 1999, NLC staff asked the following questions:

- What are the most critical issues and emerging challenges related to young people and their families in your city?
- What are the underlying factors that have brought these issues to the fore?
- How is your city responding to these issues?
- What's working?
- What makes the work harder?
- In what areas would your city do more, if you had the know-how and the resources?

The comments we heard underscored the fact that the vitality of cities and the success of children, youth, and families are closely linked. At the same time, the officials' answers showed the remarkable breadth of issues confronting cities and city officials across the country, as well as the significant variations in how different cities have addressed these issues, based on such factors as history, location, and political context.

Municipalities in Transition
Project Background

Change has always been the hallmark of America's cities. In this new century, every aspect of our cities - and our society as a whole - seems to be moving at warp speed, though not always straight ahead. To help determine what's driving this change, where it will take us, and how communities across the country can both cope with and take advantage of change, the National League of Cities launched its Municipalities in Transition Project in 1997. The project's goal is to better connect what is *really* happening in American cities to the creation of more responsive, flexible, and effective public policy. Now in its third year, the project has been guided by input from a cross section of 30 cities and relies on one-to-one conversations with city officials, rather than large-scale surveys. The 30 participating cities were selected to provide variety in three key areas: income levels, employment growth, and city fiscal conditiions, as well as in combinations of these factors.

NLC launched the Project in an effort to better understand the range of internal and external forces that hinder - and motivate - urban progress. The Project's first document, *Major Factors Affecting America's Cities*, revealed six themes consistently mentioned by city officials as significantly altering their communities. Although these factors play out somewhat differently from one locale to another, cities large and small have felt the impact of the "new economy," limited revenue capacity, the movement of people and businesses,

suburbanization and sprawl, education, and changing city government roles and relationships.

City Voices, Children's Needs Findings

City Voices, Children's Needs continues to explore questions of change and transition, with a focus on municipal roles affecting children, youth, and families. The following are the key findings from NLC's conversations with municipal officials about these issues. Each of these findings is described in greater detail in the following sections of the report.

- **Cities are redefining their relationships with schools in part to help address deep concerns about school improvement and academic achievement.** Twenty-five of the 28 cities interviewed reported that city halls' relationships with local school systems are among their top concerns. In addition to a broad focus on school reform and student achievement, city officials frequently mentioned issues related to language diversity, overcrowding, and school safety. While mayors typically do not control or run public schools and frequently are not interested in doing so, municipal officials are seeking ways to improve the quality of education in their communities by actively supporting and building partnerships with their school systems.

- **City leaders remain worried about violence by and against youth, and they see greater investments in positive youth development as an important way to reduce violence in their communities.** Officials in half of the cities represented in the interviews told us that the safety of children and youth is an important issue in their communities. They expressed particular concern about school safety, juvenile crime, abuse and neglect, and domestic violence. Nearly all of the officials we interviewed noted the need for an expansion of programs that offer constructive activities for children and youth during nonschool hours and that help young people grow, learn, and develop. If they had the resources to do more, cities would focus on creating more youth centers that offer safe places to meet and play, as well as recreation, enrichment, and mentoring programs for children and youth.

- **The effects of underemployment and lagging wages experienced by low-skilled workers in the "new economy" are intensifying the problems facing children and families.** Seventeen of the 28 cities identified underemployment or unemployment, the challenges of moving from welfare to work, or other aspects of the "new economy" as concerns. Despite a growing economy, cities reported that income gaps are expanding, and that the families that are being left behind are finding it increasingly hard to obtain affordable housing, health care, and child care. Wage differentials and poverty, along with long-standing patterns of racism and economic segregation, were most frequently cited as the underlying causes of the problems facing children, youth, and families. City officials said they would like to do more to create entry-level jobs, eliminate racism, and ensure affordable housing, but they acknowledged that these are particularly difficult areas in which to make progress.

- **The majority of cities reported being highly involved in collaborative strategies to address child and family issues.** Twenty-six of the 28 responding cities said they are involved in one or more collaborative efforts. Sixteen of them cited a high degree of involvement, but only 12 cities expressly stated that they have the requisite capacity to participate effectively. Cities pointed to the ability to "convene, coordinate, and identify resources" as the most effective way to respond to the new and emerging needs of children, youth, and families in their communities.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

II. Connecting Schools and Communities

Cities are redefining their relationships with schools, in part to help address deep concerns about school improvement and academic achievement. Twenty-five of the 28 cities interviewed reported that city halls' relationships with local school systems are among their top concerns. In addition to a broad focus on school reform and student achievement, city officials frequently mentioned issues related to language diversity, overcrowding, and school safety. While mayors typically do not control or run public schools and frequently are not interested in doing so, municipal officials are seeking ways to improve the quality of education in their communities, by actively supporting and building partnerships with their school systems.

Cities are well aware of the interrelationship between successful schools and urban vitality. Think about it. What other institution so personally touches families and children and affects their life chances for such an extended period of time? At the same time, what other institution has such an effect on a city's well-being and future prosperity? When schools are safe, innovative, and high-achieving, they attract families and businesses into urban areas. When they involve parents, support teachers, and give students the tools they need to meet high expectations, they ensure a competent workforce, diminish economic disparity, and chip away at racial and ethnic divides.

Municipal leaders know that education matters. When NLC asked city leaders about six critical factors affecting the future well-being of America's cities as part of its annual opinion survey late last year, the quality of local education drew the most responses. Nearly four in five respondents indicated that education quality will have a large or very large impact on the future of their communities.[1] Similarly, in 1997, when an NLC survey asked more than 300 local government officials and community leaders from 90 cities and towns about the components they think make up a family-friendly city, about three-quarters put education-related activities at the top of the list.[2]

Nearly four in five respondents indicated that education quality will have a large or very large impact on the future of their communities.

The city voices we heard in our interviews for *City Voices, Children's Needs* raised significant concerns about the ability of schools to meet the increasing demands they are facing. Nearly a third of all respondents referred either to tougher achievement standards and graduation requirements or to the impact of increasingly diverse student bodies, mobility, and overcrowding on student achievement. Respondents' comments also underscored changing city-school relationships designed to complement and promote learning, both in school and beyond.

Responding to Standards-Based School Reform

Since the mid- to late-1980s, major school reform efforts have taken hold in most states and many school districts throughout the nation. The most recent standards-based reforms have sought to define levels of academic achievement that schools and individual students should reach. While state approaches differ and states are at varying stages in implementing their reforms, most rely heavily on standardized tests in attempts to hold schools accountable for reaching achievement standards. Over time, many states also intend to base decisions regarding graduation or promotion to the next grade on student performance on these tests.[3]

The increasing use of high-stakes tests as the basis for graduation and advancement in school has left many city officials concerned about how, and whether, students and schools

- Alexandria, Virginia - Linking After-School Learning to In-School Achievement

Alexandria officials are doing more than waiting to see how well schools and students perform against newly introduced state learning standards. As part of an effort to introduce a community-wide continuum of care, city officials are working to develop enriched after-school programs with a focus on learning through fun. The city expects these programs to enhance a child's ability to do well in school and on standardized tests. Current programs, by contrast, are primarily recreational in focus. The city hopes to involve parents in designing a prototype that will link in-school and after-school activities and help strengthen students' academic performance while allowing for participation in sports and recreational activities.

in their communities will meet the new standards. Officials in Galveston and Charlotte, for example, cited state education standards as an emerging challenge, with Galveston officials particularly concerned about how non-English-speaking students will fare under the new requirements. Boston officials reported that "our greatest educational challenge is meeting standards set three years ago by the state." In Detroit, clusters of schools have revised their spending priorities and educational agenda in line with a whole school reform plan. These findings help explain why the quality of education was cited as a major or moderate problem by a majority of respondents in NLC's most recent annual opinion survey.

Mobility and Diversity

Communities struggling to deal with increased mobility and demographic change are especially concerned about school reform. "It's hard to keep up in a community where 27 languages are spoken in one elementary school," said one Tempe official. The movement of people and businesses into and out of the city, as well as suburban growth and sprawl, were described as significant sources of change in NLC's *Major Factors* report. In our *City Voices, Children's Needs* conversations, city officials repeatedly raised issues related to immigration and migration and their impact on community institutions - and schools in particular.

The search for ways to help families from other countries fit into their communities is under way in heartland cities such as Minneapolis, where a growing Somalian and East African population is located, as well as in border-state cities such as Galveston and North Miami. Still other cities, including Madison, are adjusting to newcomers moving in from nearby urban centers such as Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis. "Whether they come from a different country or just a different ethnic group, it's a challenge," said one Minneapolis official.

Cultural tensions are inevitable. In Alexandria, officials are working to help parents from many different cultures adjust to a new environment that often has much different expectations for families and children than the culture from which they came. In Yonkers, officials say some families are so wary of government that they don't take advantage of services they need and are fully eligible for. And, in Iowa City, a significant number of people who have resided in the community for only a short period of time become involved in the local service delivery system - everything from prevention services and child protection to school attendance issues, substance abuse treatment, and corrections. When their status as newcomers is the focus of the media or public information, mistrust and division can occur. According to Iowa City officials, the likely reasons for the high rate of participation of new arrivals in these programs include an unfamiliarity with community expectations (e.g., the desire for children to attend school on a regular basis) and an underdeveloped support system - family, friends, neighbors - that can offer needed assistance and advice.

A great strength of immigrant and migrant families to America has always been their ability to help and support one another. The rational response of families from the same communities of origin to cluster in specific areas often creates very concentrated enclaves. An unfortunate result of this clustering is that new immigration patterns, as well as decades-old geographic divisions, can isolate neighborhoods and schools. A number of respondents characterized their communities as weakened by lack of understanding amid diversity, eroding community values, and overburdened families. Officials cited the weakening of their communities as a factor in many of the problems facing children, youth, and families.

A New Haven official believes the role of city hall is to "tackle scary issues" and help people better understand how their community is changing. "Building community is the best way to address a variety of issues," said a Columbus official. But how does a city go about building community? Many view the creation of citywide family support centers as a key step. These centers provide a range of services, information, and referrals to families in a central location, often at or near schools but in other community locations as well. In Minneapolis, for example, a Family and Community Resource Center has been established at a school in each of five city regions that correspond to neighborhood school attendance areas. Each region determines strategies to address citywide priorities identified through a process that involves community inputs.

- Seattle, Washington -
Undoing Racism

A collaboration of local institutions in Seattle, including the city, school districts, and community residents, is taking aim "at institutional practices and policies which afford privilege to whites over people of color."[4] Started as a grassroots movement by the city's Human Services Department, the collaborative has used funding from both city and county budgets and nonprofit organizations to train more than 800 staff and residents in how to encourage dialogue in their respective communities and workplaces.

- Denver, Colorado -
Great Kids Initiative Promotes Strong Schools

Denver's citywide population may be prosperous and largely Anglo, but the profile looks considerably different in the city's public schools. Fifty percent of enrolled students are Latino, and 22 percent are African American. Thirty percent of students come from single-parent families. And only half of the Latino students who start high school graduate. City officials are concerned about economic fallout down the line, as baby boomers age and are replaced by fewer, less-educated new workers. Soon the ratio of workers to retirees is expected to drop to two to one. What will happen if one of those two is unemployable? In response to these concerns, the city has established a Great Kids Initiative focusing on preschool, after-school literacy, health and school safety, and community-building.

Community-School Partnerships

In most jurisdictions, the school system and the city government are entirely separate entities. City officials in these communities have no legal authority over what school districts do and no control over such issues as funding priorities, school policies, and whether local schools can account for what and how well their children are learning. Forty-one percent of cities surveyed by NLC in 1995 reported no involvement in issues or concerns related to education and public

- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - Supporting Families and School Success

In Philadelphia, the Mayor's Children and Families Cabinet has opened 19 Family Centers throughout the city. The purpose of the centers is not only to provide services but also to build the capacity of community members to influence the quality and delivery of public services and the well-being of their neighborhoods. Lead agencies manage the centers, but neighborhood collaboratives set their direction and intended outcomes. Each center provides a different package of services and supports geared to all aspects of family life. In addition, every center must select an area in which it expects to make specific progress and plan its offerings accordingly. In 1999, the choices were school readiness, academic achievement, or violence reduction.

schooling, and 52 percent indicated no involvement in school dropout issues. But when school-related issues threaten to affect major city concerns such as public safety, economic development, and employment, municipal leaders are becoming more and more aware that jurisdictional boundaries don't matter. Residents and voters just want the problems solved, and they look to their elected officials for results.

In the burgeoning Charlotte-Mecklenberg school district, according to one official, "There used to be a very traditional relationship between city and school with very little interaction around minor things like crossing guards. Now rapid growth is changing all that." Adding to the need for a new community-school partnership was a recent federal court decision barring the school system from using race as a factor in setting policy and making school assignments. The decision has halted busing in Charlotte and generated substantial controversy.

Virtually everyone agrees that the stability and growth of Charlotte-Mecklenberg will be affected by the school district's ability to transform existing magnet schools in the inner city into high-achieving neighborhood schools. Not surprisingly, "education has become a priority in Charlotte ... and the role of education is prominent in the governance of the community," according to the official we interviewed.

Like Charlotte, a growing number of jurisdictions are moving toward what Denver Mayor Wellington Webb calls "the third way." While continuing to respect school districts' autonomy and their ultimate control over academic matters, more jurisdictions are finding ways to support and complement the work of the schools. The idea is to promote educational success while not replacing or taking over the mission of the school district. Collaborative efforts between cities and schools frequently focus on supporting families - developing better access to health and human services through community and school-linked centers and creating more safe and stimulating opportunities for young people through after-school programs, mentoring, and recreation.

While continuing to respect school districts' autonomy and their ultimate control over academic matters, more jurisdictions are finding ways to support and complement the work of the schools.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

III. Ensuring Safety and Promoting Positive Youth Development

City leaders remain worried about violence by and against youth, and they see greater investments in positive youth development as an important way to reduce violence in their communities. Officials in half of the cities represented in the interviews told us that the safety of children and youth is an important issue in their communities. They expressed particular concern about school safety, juvenile crime, abuse and neglect, and domestic violence. Nearly all of the officials we interviewed noted the need for an expansion of programs that offer constructive activities for children and youth during nonschool hours and that help young people grow, learn, and develop. If they had the resources to do more, cities would focus on creating more youth centers that offer safe places to meet and play, as well as recreation, enrichment, and mentoring programs for children and youth.

Safety is the first charge of any city government; people look to their local elected leaders to keep violence and crime to a minimum. Violence committed by and against children and young people is especially troubling to residents and municipal officials alike. It is an issue of growing concern in 31 percent of cities represented in the *City Voices, Children's Needs* interviews. Some officials are anxious to prevent young people from abusing drugs and alcohol or engaging in any kind of criminal behavior. Others point to young people as victims of abuse, neglect, and the violence of others. Officials also are concerned about the lack of gun control and mental health counseling, especially for depressed teens.

While stemming the tide of violence is a critical issue, respondents are not convinced that the juvenile detention centers sprouting up in many communities offer the best answer. A Fort Wayne official noted that "people are starting to question why we keep locking (young people) up without thinking more about prevention." Another official, repeating the concern of many of those we interviewed, stated that there is a "skewed relationship between the severity of problems we're seeing and our response to them." The official continued: "We wait 'til someone lands in jail and even then we don't do much." On the other hand, Tulsa's mayor makes the case that increasing attention to the issues of early childhood education and intervention for at-risk children and youth will reduce the need for new jails.

Officials were in agreement that youth violence often is a result of too few opportunities for young people to be active, valued, and involved. Cities see a growing need for programs that serve children of all ages, including child care and activities targeted at students in grades 4 though 8. The officials' comments reflect the strong support for after-school programs uncovered in recent polling data. According to a 1999 national survey conducted by the Mott Foundation and JC Penney, nine out of ten voters said they believe after-school programs should be available to all children every day. Eighty-six percent considered them a necessity.[5]

A Fort Wayne official noted that "people are starting to question why we keep locking (young people) up without thinking more about prevention."

Support for after-school programs reflects the belief that young people need to feel their community has a place for them. In Los Angeles, LA's Best, a joint after-school program for elementary school students, has spread throughout the city and become nationally recognized.

Regardless of a city's size or the severity of its problems, officials said cities need to change the way they think about and respond to

- Boston, Massachusetts - A Comprehensive Approach to Youth Violence

In Boston, a collaborative effort among the city and its faith, business, human services, and hospital communities has radically reduced youth violence. As part of a strategy called Operation Cease Fire, city police and fire departments have worked with the U.S. Attorney's Office to target gang leaders and prosecute them under federal law. The homicide rate dropped 75 percent between 1990 and 1998, and there have been no youths killed by firearms in the city since 1996. At the same time, the city actively promotes education reforms, youth development, and employment opportunities for young people. The annual school dropout rate has been cut in half since the mid 1980s and, in 1997 alone, 11,000 young people acquired work skills in summer jobs.

youth. Roughly one-third of the 19 areas in which city officials specifically noted that they would like to do more were related to creating safe places and positive experiences for youth. If they had the resources, respondents would do more to expand after-school and child care opportunities, create more neighborhood youth and recreation centers, and provide a mentoring relationship for every child.

The most basic problem cities see is the sheer lack of places for young people to go. In North Miami, for instance, open space is almost nonexistent. Youngsters play soccer on any strip of green they can find, including roadway medians.

Respondents also cited the need to overhaul adult attitudes toward youth. According to an Abilene official, "There is a gap between the worlds that adults and kids live in. We don't always understand their needs, problems and concerns." In the past, added an official from Great Falls, "youth weren't made to feel welcome." Groups of young people who were just hanging out were sent packing, the official said, when "the problem was that there really wasn't anything for them to do or any place for them to go."

"We're seeing more and more young people who want to get involved in solving community problems . . . and they are much more willing than adults to reach out across racial, gender, class, and sexual orientation barriers."

Despite widespread concern about places and activities for youth, cities are heartened by a promising trend: young people's willingness to participate in local decision making. Said a New Haven official, "We're seeing more and more young people who want to get involved in solving community problems ... and they are much more willing than adults to reach out across racial, gender, class, and sexual orientation barriers." Twenty-five of the 28 cities represented in our interviews already are working to engage young people in addressing youth issues. Many cities either have, or are in the process of developing, a youth advisory board to provide young people's perspectives on important issues and to make recommendations to city government. In addition, youth are represented to some degree on community collaboratives in most communities, while in others, they are involved in departmental planning work.

City officials are enthusiastic about these developments but acknowledge that they only involve a very small proportion of the young people in their cities. Seeking to get a broader cross-section of youth involved, Seattle recently has shifted away from a single, citywide Youth Commission toward multiple student advisory committees located in every city agency whose work affects young people's lives. Doing so has increased the number of young people who can participate and has brought them closer to the issues they know and care most about. In another ex-

ample of how cities can broaden youth participation. Little Rock recently hired a full-time staff person to develop youth issues and marshal youth participation. The city also is funding a related media strategy.

- North Miami, Florida -
Making Room for Youth

North Miami's APPLE program (At-Risk Programs Promoting Leisure Education) has been in business since 1992. It was designed to respond to parent, business, and community concerns about teens who went to school in the city's crowded central business district but who had nothing to do after school. Developed by the Department of Parks and Recreation, the program provides a free "drop-in" program at the area middle school where students participate in intramural and intercity sports, take trips to athletic events, and burn off energy in other constructive activities. "Apples" also are based at each of the city's five elementary schools. Sixty students at each school are selected by teachers to participate for free. The only stipulation is that teachers *not* choose either all the best- or all the worst-performing students. Since its inception, the program has expanded to include mentoring and arts components, and police officers now participate as planners and outreach workers to help draw teens to center activities.

- Boston, Massachusetts -
Setting Youth Policy

In Boston, community members voting at schools and community centers throughout the city elect a 36-member Youth Council. The council meets monthly with the mayor and can bring any issue to his attention, as long as council members have a specific idea about how the issue should be addressed. Two years ago, students proposed that travel hours on student bus passes be extended from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM, so young people could stay longer at the city's community centers. The mayor raised the issue with the Transit Authority, and new passes soon were issued to allow for the extended hours.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IV. The Impact of Shifts To A New Economy

The effects of underemployment and lagging wages experienced by low-skilled workers in the "new economy" are intensifying the problems facing children and families. Seventeen of the 28 cities identified underemployment or unemployment, the challenges of moving from welfare to work, or other aspects of the "new economy" as concerns. Despite a growing economy, cities reported that income gaps are expanding, and that the families that are being left behind are finding it increasingly hard to obtain affordable housing, health care, and child care. Wage differentials and poverty, along with long-standing patterns of racism and economic segregation, were most frequently cited as the underlying causes of the problems facing children, youth, and families. City officials said they would like to do more to create entry-level jobs, eliminate racism, and ensure affordable housing, but they acknowledged that these are particularly difficult areas in which to make progress.

For many Americans, finding work has never been easier. In early 2000, we reached what many would call full employment, a four-percent unemployment rate. The prosperity of the last decade has gone on so long that most school children have never even heard such terms as "double-digit inflation" or "national deficit." But persistent problems remain.

Wage Disparities

The NLC report, *Major Factors Affecting America's Cities*, noted that the New Economy is significantly changing the competitive and economic landscape of cities, primarily because of its origin in two basic transformations in production and markets. On the one hand, there is a structural shift in production away from manufacturing toward services and information. And, on the other, globalization is resulting in the expansion of markets and commerce far beyond national or regional borders.

The combined effect of these changes has been enormous economic growth for many cities, with the downside being that the growth has disproportionately benefited upper-income residents. Since 1993, according to a just-released report by the Council of Economic Advisors, real income has risen for families at the bottom of the income scale, as well as for those at the top. However, the average income for workers in the top 20 percent of families is more than 11 times higher than the average for those in the lowest 20 percent - a gap wider than at any point since at least World War II.[6] In another recent study, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Economic Policy Institute found that the average real income of high-income families grew by 15 percent during the 1990s. In contrast, average income remained the same for the lowest-income families and grew by less than two percent for middle-income families.[7]

City officials are concerned that despite the recent economic gains, they are seeing an increasing disparity between rich and poor. In Charlotte, which has become one of the nation's premier banking and finance centers, a city official said, "People are making lots of money . . . there is a strong sense of well-being and prosperity among many citizens." At the same time, however, the official said this same "prosperity makes it harder for more affluent residents to see the real needs that do exist."

Unemployment and Underemployment

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's *March 1998 Current Population Survey*, 28 percent of children live in families without steady, full-time employment. City officials are well aware of how the prevailing economic statistics hide the unemployment of those who are too discouraged to keep looking for work. As a Boston official observed: "Our city unemployment rate is at 2 or 3 percent, but we know there are pockets where it is more like 10 percent."

Of equal concern is the extent to which people are underemployed - working but not making enough to make ends meet. Said one official, "It almost doesn't make sense anymore to go after low-paying jobs - nobody wants them because they don't pay enough."

Persistent concerns about unemployment and underemployment have made city officials wary about the future. "Personally, I believe that despite our booming economy, the gap growing between the haves and the people left behind will affect high numbers of children, youth, and families in the next generation," said one respondent. A Rochester official suggested that increasingly entrenched economic differences already are being felt. "We are seeing all the same problems but the level of disparity exacerbates them ... We're seeing a larger population with more intensive needs."

Moving from Welfare to Work

Several participants in our *City Voices, Children's Needs* interviews pointed to the challenges faced by families and cities alike in making the transition from welfare to work. In 1995, on the eve of welfare reform, 56 percent of cities and towns surveyed in an NLC study thought that the leading welfare reform proposals at the time would worsen rather than improve poverty. Only three out of ten thought there would be enough jobs to go around, and fully four-fifths feared that local communities would bear much of the welfare burden.[8]

City officials are concerned that despite the recent economic gains, they are seeing an increasing disparity between rich and poor.

Nearly five years later, there has been a dramatic decline in welfare caseloads. Half to two-thirds of the families that have left assistance are now working but usually in jobs with earnings below the poverty level.[9] Largely because of the vigorous economy, this first phase of welfare reform, as one city official observed, "was not doomsday, as many had expected." Said another official, "The first third of the easy-to-place people have been taken care of."

Officials know that it will not be as easy to find employment for those who have been on assistance longer or those who have fewer skills or special needs. Almost half of family heads who must move off welfare lack a high school diploma, and from 10 to 15 percent have disabilities that limit employment.[10] City officials also are unsure what is really happening to former welfare families. Some early analysis suggests that more than half of newly employed recipients lost their first jobs within a year.[11]

- Denver, Colorado -
Tackling Youth Unemployment

Determined that "Denver's strong economy should leave no one behind," a community-wide planning group has developed a multi-pronged strategy to make sure that out-of-school youth are not forgotten. The strategy emphasizes innovative recruitment, out-stationed case managers, and a range of education and training, including work experience for young people. Funded with a $2.25 million Department of Labor Youth Opportunity Grant, the effort seeks to raise the employment rate of out-of-school youth in three Denver neighborhoods by 80 percent. With Denver facing a citywide unemployment rate of just under 3 percent for the last four years, the initiative has drawn support from businesses that have found it increasingly difficult to recruit employees.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Columbus, Ohio -
Program Fosters Development in City School District

In Columbus, the City Trade and Development Office has been working since 1994 to increase home ownership in city neighborhoods. Their Capital Improvement Program encourages developers to build in the Columbus School District by covering some of the costs associated with developing streets and infrastructure in the areas where houses will be built. The city funds the project, and developers do all the marketing. So far, some 1,400 homes have been built and sold. While not claiming the entire credit, city officials note that the rising rate of home ownership has been accompanied by an increase in school enrollment.

According to an official from Madison, "Many families have disappeared. We want to know where they've gone."

Finding Affordable Housing

Home ownership, the *sine qua non* of family stability, has never been higher in America's cities. The current 67-percent ownership rate can be explained not only by the prosperous economy and savvy consumers, but also by more flexible and creative mortgage options and better enforcement of fair housing laws. That's the good news.

The bad news, according to many city officials, is that for low-income families there is a serious lack of adequate, affordable housing. Rapid population growth in "built-out" cities such as North Miami has led to families doubling and tripling up in units designed to accommodate many fewer occupants. Meanwhile, in cities such as Detroit, where population is not growing, a lack of suitable housing choices at all income ranges is exacerbating the population drain. Research shows that inadequate housing correlates with setbacks in developmental growth, educational achievement, nutrition, and overall physical health. Children with housing problems are more likely to transfer schools, have trouble establishing residency for special programs, and experience delays in transferring records from one school to another.[12]

A city official from Minneapolis framed the problem in this way: "The mobility of families and affordable housing are some of our biggest challenges, but we don't yet have the capacity or resources to fully address them." Housing realities are especially bleak for families transitioning from welfare and the working poor. The National Low Income Housing Coalition reports a loss of 900,000 rental units available to very low-income families, a nine-percent decline between 1993 and 1995. The housing that remains is often not affordable. In 39 states, 40 percent or more of renters cannot afford a two-bedroom unit, based on the local Fair Market Rent set by the federal government for assisted housing.[13]

- Great Falls, Montana -
Boosting Home Ownership Among Native Americans

In Great Falls, a partnership among the city, a local bank, a university, realtors, the county extension office, and Native American nonprofits is working to increase home ownership among Native American families. The Native American Home Ownership Partnership Program is designed to educate families about the home-buying process, help them apply for a mortgage, and provide down-payment cash assistance using HUD grant funds. Funds are not currently available, but the partnership maintains its focus on outreach and building trust in the Native American community.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"The mobility of families and affordable housing are some of our biggest challenges, but we don't yet have the capacity or resources to fully address them."

Declining Health Insurance Coverage

Among the many ripple effects of underemployment is that it diminishes the ability of families to purchase health care. In the United States, health care is provided largely through employer plans. Although Medicaid covers about one child in every four, the dramatic drop in welfare roles has been paralleled by a similar decline in Medicaid enrollment. According to one early study, 45 percent of mothers who left welfare for work were uninsured three years later.[14] In recent years, the number of employers providing health insurance benefits also has declined, with many businesses using temporary and contract employees so they don't have to pay benefits at all. Even when individual workers are covered, they may not make enough to pay the premiums needed to insure their children.

These trends recently have become more pronounced in communities such as Iowa City, where a municipal official said it is now widely accepted that the city's low unemployment rate "hides a lot of underemployment and temporary workers who don't have benefits such as health insurance." Great Falls officials specifically cited lack of insurance coverage for dental care as an issue that they wish they had the capacity to address. Similarly, an official in Tulsa expressed concern saying, "We have a lot of uninsured children. It keeps me up nights thinking about what we can do for them."

- Yonkers, New York -
Coordinating Health Care Issues

Healthy Yonkers, a coalition led jointly by the City of Yonkers and a local medical center, brings together service providers from a range of fields with a common interest in children's health. In addition to providing a venue for planning, the coalition serves as a clearinghouse to coordinate funding opportunities and applications.

One large-scale initiative that may help to address some of these concerns is the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Recently launched by the federal government, CHIP is designed to help states insure approximately 11 million children under 19 years of age who are not eligible for Medicaid but whose family incomes fall below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. States and communities are just beginning to implement this legislation, and local community collaboratives can play an important role in developing an effective local strategy to reach out to potential beneficiaries.[15]

Finding Child Care

Between 1947 and 1997, the percentage of working women with children under the age of six rose from 12 percent to 64 percent. In a 1996 NLC report, *Critical Needs, Critical Choices*, child care was ranked as one of the three most pressing needs of children and families by 30 percent of respondents; it received more votes than any other item on a list of 34.[16] Since then, cities have made considerable progress. According to a recent survey of municipal elected officials, 25 percent said the availability of child care in their communities had improved over the past year. Nine percent said it had worsened in the same period.[17]

In conversations for the current report, city officials spoke of the need to improve the quality, flexibility, and affordability of child care, as well as its availability. Said a Fort Wayne official: "Interest in high-quality, affordable child care is gaining prominence, partly because people in positions of power are personally facing the issue." Others noted

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Madison, Wisconsin - Improving the Quality of Child Care

The city government in Madison has a child care unit that promotes the quality of child care in the city through accreditation, grants, consultation, and training. Recently, the unit focused on the inability of many programs to fill child care jobs. In response, the unit commissioned a study of all local child care programs, looking at such issues as turnover, job vacancies, and the effects on programs. Thanks to the study, the city learned that job vacancies had led to the loss of 400 child care spaces in Madison in 1999. Higher-paying centers had the least turnover, but all centers were affected in some way. As a next step, the mayor's office is planning a symposium on child care wages and quality, with participants from all over the state. Cosponsors of the symposium include the United Way, Dane County, the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, and the Council on Children and Families.

hat demand is growing rapidly among low income families. "We have seen lots of stresses resulting from welfare to work," said a city official from Tempe. "Even when you can find child care, and especially when it's good care, it isn't affordable." According to a Savannah official, there are two emerging issues: need for facilities to care for sick children whose parents must be at work and need for after-hours child care for families who work the swing shift or at night.

Finding suitable staff to operate child care centers presents a major challenge. In Iowa City, for example, the Human Services Department's efforts to establish child care at an area mall have been slowed by difficulty in finding enough child care workers to staff the program. The service would be an important step toward providing care during nontraditional hours, but potential employees are more likely to take retail jobs that offer better pay. Improving salaries for child care workers is an issue in Madison as well, where the city currently is discussing wage requirements for nonprofits funded through the City Services Commission.

Searching For New Ways: Community-Wide Collaborations

The majority of cities reported being highly involved in collaborative strategies to address child and family issues. Twenty-six of the 28 responding cities said they are involved in one or more collaborative efforts. Sixteen of them cited a high degree of involvement, but only 12 cities expressly stated that they have the requisite capacity to participate effectively. Cities pointed to the ability to "convene, coordinate, and identify resources" as the most effective way to respond to the new and emerging needs of children, youth, and families in their communities

City officials interviewed for the *City Voices, Children's Needs* project identified a host of issues affecting the well-being of children and families, including: community safety, youth development, school achievement, equitable workforce participation, and access to essential goods and services. The officials we interviewed made it clear that they view these issues as increasingly crosscutting in nature. Even in what may have been "simpler" times, cities seldom had the resources or the direct control over programs that they would have needed to address the needs of children and families by themselves. Now that the challenges seem more complex and interrelated, increasing numbers of city officials are searching for new ways that emphasize partnerships and community-wide collaborations as the keys to progress. "How do we cross agency and information barriers?" asked a Los Angeles official in expressing his desire to have each child be able to use each of the programs for which he or she qualifies rather than just one or two.

Nearly all cities reported that they are involved in one or more collaborative efforts designed to meet the needs of children and families.

Nearly all cities reported that they are involved in one or more collaborative efforts designed to meet the needs of children and families. These collaboratives reflect widespread agreement that a full-scale response to youth and family concerns will require more resources than even combined city agencies can provide - not just money but also expertise, time, and access to facilities. A Detroit official put it this way: "The city is highly involved in children, youth, and family issues but we just don't have enough staff or funding to fully respond . . . The resources we have are stretched very thin. We could easily use two to three times more people to get the job done."

Collaborative efforts with multiple community partners are a logical response to the reality that cities cannot act effectively on these issues alone. Many of the collaborative efforts in which cities are involved focus on a single issue such as child care or housing; several communities are engaged in more comprehensive efforts to improve multiple outcomes. While cities were not asked to evaluate their partnership efforts, their comments suggest that partnerships and collaborations designed to provide specific services or implement a narrow program often are seen as highly successful.

Meanwhile, comprehensive initiatives aimed at substantial change in aggregate measures of community well-being are more difficult to sell and sustain. According to a Savannah official, that city's broad-based New Futures Authority collaborative has a strong commitment to performance measurements and benchmarking. Often this commitment can be an enormous challenge when attempting to measure human conditions and program outcomes.

Key Ingredients for Successful Community-Based Collaborations

In the *City Voices, Children's Needs* interviews, city officials identified a number of key

ingredients that can boost the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. These included:

- **Political Leadership.** City officials know that strong support from political leaders is a critical element in focusing and sustaining community-wide efforts to help children and families. In Abilene, for example, the former mayor convened a community coalition to develop a comprehensive plan to support children, youth, and families. The mayor strengthened the coalition's efforts by helping partners evaluate all of their decisions based on a consistent criterion: "Is what we are planning good for children?" When key leaders do not take the lead, staff members can encourage City Hall interest in children, youth, and family issues by showing their relevance to other city interests, such as economic development, workforce development, and safety.
- **Private and Civic Sector Involvement.** In the words of a Fort Wayne official, "Public/private partnerships get people motivated." When business sees fit to get involved, people pay attention and resources open up. Every city agrees that political leadership is essential but, in some cases, "leadership can be more important coming from a CEO than a LEO," said one official. Involving highly influential and well-known figures, whether from the business world or other sectors, lends visibility to a children, youth, and family agenda and can help to elevate discussions about these issues throughout the community. According to one official, it often takes "someone of stature, not just the youth person" to excite people's passions and convince them that something can and must be done.
- **Neighborhood and Grassroots Participation.** A number of cities agreed that collaboratives are more effective when the initiative comes from or is embraced by the grassroots. As one respondent put it, "There needs to be a strong emphasis on neighborhood groups. If you can win them over, you can really start to improve things." Neighborhood associations in some communities have been around for many years, but cities are working both to strengthen existing models and to develop new mechanisms for citizen input to shape city planning and collaborative work. Fort Wayne, for example, has 258 neighborhood associations already in place. The problem is that low-income areas are underrepresented among the associations, so the city is making an effort to broaden their involvement. In Great Falls, voters recently approved a system of Neighborhood Councils to make sure city government hears and responds to neighborhood concerns.

- Yonkers, New York -
What's *Really* Needed

In Yonkers, the city was planning to replace sidewalks and install new lighting in certain neighborhoods. But when officials presented the plan in public, residents said what they really wanted were after-school programs and more police coverage. The city listened, scheduled a series of community meetings to talk more, and came up with a revised plan more consistent with what neighbors saw as their most pressing priorities.

- New Haven, Connecticut -
Citizen Input

New Haven residents are becoming more vocal about not being ignored or left out of community processes. For example, in planning for a new shopping mall, residents' input was solicited. The result was the incorporation of a job training and referral outreach center in the mal

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- **Flexible Funding and Core Support.** In general, cities are spending more on services for children and families than they have in the past. In 1995, over half of the nation's cities reported moderate to substantial increases in spending on these services compared to five years earlier.[5] In the *City Voices, Children's Needs* interviews, most cities indicated that a medium and, in some cases, a high level of money and staff are earmarked for children, youth, and family concerns in their jurisdictions - usually enough to meet current program commitments. Officials agreed, however, that the most innovative responses depend on a core source of flexible funding. Cities such as Seattle and Little Rock, for example, have generated creative, new funding for children and youth that can be used as the community sees fit, rather than in accordance with strict categorical requirements. With a predictable source of locally controlled income in hand, cities are better able to sustain efforts long enough to see real gains and to leverage additional private and public support.

- Seattle, Washington -
Tax Levy Focuses Public Support for Families

Seattle's Family and Education Levy grew out of a mayoral initiative to strengthen schools and learning by supporting families. It began in 1991 with a weekend public awareness event after which a community group planned and supported passage of an eight-year tax levy. The $8.5 million generated annually finances a system of school and neighborhood family centers, including health clinics, child care, and child development programs. An Oversight Committee composed of the mayor, council members, parents, the school superintendent, and others provides policy direction, with the City Office on Education serving as administrative liaison between the city and school district in planning for and using funds. Building on the momentum generated by the Levy was a Children and Youth Action Plan that required the city to budget $1 million in new funding every year to support youth services. The Levy has been renewed for a second eight years. Together, they have increased base city funding for children and families by $12.5 million.

Potential Obstacles to Progress

Just as our interviews surfaced several key ingredients of successful collaboratives, they also spotlighted specific obstacles to progress, including:

- **Multiple Initiatives.** In most urban areas, multiple partnerships, collaboratives, and public and private agencies are involved in children, youth, and family issues. Many cities said they need to do a better job linking initiatives so everyone knows what everyone else is doing. In Boston, Savannah, and Iowa City, officials are working with the United Way and other community collaboratives to coordinate activities and reduce the chance of duplication, in some cases, by establishing outcomes agreed to by the community at large.

- **Competing Priorities.** Setting priorities can be difficult, especially in communities where "everything is a priority." "When you try to build one program," said a Rochester official, "you end up stepping on someone else's toes." An official from Madison agreed, asserting that "it is especially difficult to generate and sustain political will for a comprehensive agenda when it requires shifting away from long-standing funding priorities." According to a Philadelphia respondent, "There is an expectation that government will always continue to support agencies at the same level - forever. So it can be politically risky to reallocate money into new areas that need attention."

- **Empty Chairs at the Table.** Despite strong evidence of collaborative partnerships in most cities, several cities expressed dissatisfaction with the level of involvement on the part of business. The reasons for the private sector's under-involvement vary. In Philadelphia, several large corporations have moved out in recent years. Those that remain tend to be tightly focused on economic development issues. In the past, they have come to the table on closely related topics such as child care and education but are now being recruited to become involved in broader youth development efforts. In Orlando, the problem is that the major businesses operating locally are not headquartered there. Corporate decisions are made in other cities and are therefore not as connected to local concerns as they might otherwise be. Leaders in Seattle's large software industry are highly entrepreneurial and are more interested in working and contributing independently than in partnering efforts, said a local official. "We have 35 millionaires in the area, but they do things on their own; they don't see themselves as part of a collaborative community effort."

  Some cities also noted the need for greater involvement by the faith community. In Eugene, the reason for the faith community's lack of participation is simple: the city is home to a relatively small number of churches considering its size. In other areas, officials say churches are interested in children, youth, and family issues but that they are more involved in serving their own membership rather than forming collaborations aimed at young people and families in the larger community.

- **Flagging Attention and Unfocused Public Support.** Cities agree that it is difficult to explain and sustain public interest in a positive, comprehensive agenda for children and families. Marketing a clear and concise message is essential. One official spoke for many of those we interviewed when he faulted a tendency to advocate "lofty, nebulous goals no one understands." Others claimed the media too often politicizes these issues by paying more attention to whose agenda might be advanced than to what's best for children, youth, and families. Adding to the problem, according to one official, is that "ours is a nation that doesn't want to look at the critical issues surrounding children and families unless we are forced to...when something big happens."

Little Rock, Arkansas - Funding the Future

In 1994, Little Rock citizens along with major stakeholders and leaders participated in an 18-month planning process known as Future Little Rock. Their work spearheaded the passage of a 1/2 cent sales tax to underwrite initiatives for the city that included youth-related prevention, intervention, and treatment efforts. The city council oversees this key policy direction. The $3.2 million currently available has the potential to leverage additional monies from the city and other funding sources and to develop a comprehensive community agenda that sees "positive youth development as fundamental, not fluff."

The High Costs of Taking Initiatives to Scale

While a number of cities say they have enough money to finance current efforts and in a few cases to sustain them indefinitely, officials made clear that there is by no means enough to do all that *needs* to be done – or even to sustain current funding levels in coming years. Ambitious goals such as Denver's plan to provide universal access to extended day programs for all elementary and middle-school age children will require much greater dedicated public revenue than is currently available. "A major barrier," said

- Tempe, Arizona -
The Utility of Matching Funds

In Tempe, a partnership between the Arizona Republic Charities, the McCormick Tribune Foundation, and city government has created a matching fund for children and families. A city-administered program allows residents to add a dollar to their regular water bill payment to help support services for families. When they do, the foundation contributes an equal amount.

a Los Angeles official, "is the sheer scale of effort needed to address children, youth, and family issues in a city of 4 million. We talk about programs serving 100 kids, but we have hundreds of thousands of children." The problem is daunting not only in big cities but also in smaller jurisdictions like Eugene, "where 250 of our kids get mentoring but 2,500 need it," said an official.

About one in four city officials said a lack of resources is already a very serious concern. Current funding levels are far too low in the face of escalating needs and a declining urban tax base. Localities such as Orlando are looking to state government to increase funding formulas for education, mental health, and substance abuse so they are more in line with burgeoning needs.

Jurisdictions also reported running up against vigorous anti-tax sentiment. The impact of Initiative 601, passed recently to stop tax growth in the state of Washington, already is being felt in Seattle. The legislation requires any revenue surplus to be returned to taxpayers rather than used to meet additional needs. This restriction is "creating a slow, steady erosion in services that threatens to repeat California's experience," according to a Seattle official. In nearby Oregon, property tax limitations passed in 1990 and 1996 have led to substantial reductions in after-school activities, except for varsity sports. Libraries, recreation, and cultural services also have been cut by about a third. The state has no sales tax, and localities have had no recourse but to eliminate services.

In some instances, nonprofit organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA have stepped into the breach and are expanding their after-school activities for young people. But in Eugene, as in other localities, expansion has been costly and fees for program participation have grown. Even in Alexandria, where there is very strong community support for child-focused activities, officials know that in order to strengthen after-school programs by adding a learning component, they may have to begin charging fees.

Tips From City Officials

While often rooted in common-sense notions of leadership and collaboration, the following tips from the *City Voices, Children's Needs* interviews offer useful reminders of what it takes to build community-wide solutions to local problems.

- **Commit at the top.** Effective action is more likely to occur when political leaders and their staffs consciously decide to put children, youth, and family issues at the heart of their agenda. Many officials said there is already enough capacity and knowledge to take action. The real question is whether there is enough political will to keep going.

- **Don't wait for a crisis.** A community crisis - the death of a child in a family day care home, for example - is a surefire way to motivate action. But there are better ways to shine the spotlight on the need for better training and supervision of child care providers. Officials encouraged cities to stay ahead of the curve by promoting increased community awareness of current and emerging issues; encouraging citizen involvement; and taking action on recommendations. Change is a given, said city officials, but the way we prepare for change determines how well we handle it.

- **Hear what people care about and keep them posted.** This means to listen first. Ask people, "What do you need from us? And how can we help you meet your goals?" Reach out to families, youth, and low-income people who are not routinely involved. In one city, youth that came to a listening session were thanked with movie passes and food coupons. Don't just raise expectations; let people know how you plan to use this information and what they can expect to see next.

- **Partner well.** Don't act like a 300-pound gorilla. Cities don't have to own everything to get credit. If there is really good collaboration, come the next election your partners will remind voters what's been accomplished. Bring people in as early as possible and acknowledge the work of others.

- **Take calculated risks.** Keep an open mind - you won't get anywhere saying, "we've always done it this way." Businesses are willing to take enormous risks and call them investments; cities should do the same for children, youth, and families. Don't be afraid to "tackle scary issues." People need opportunities to talk about controversial subjects and to examine the pros and cons of varying policy approaches.

- **Frame efforts as opportunities – and keep it simple.** People stop paying attention when they are overwhelmed by an issue and don't understand the solutions that are being proposed. Express issues clearly (data helps). Show what's already working and how bringing together successful efforts can push programs to the next level. Draw parallels between other highly successful ventures and current efforts on behalf of children and families.

- **Build grassroots and staff capacity.** Cities rely on a network of well-organized and funded nonprofit organizations to design and deliver a range of culturally acceptable services to specific groups of children and families. Identify nonprofits that show promise and that could benefit from an infusion of funds, especially those connected to newly-arriving segments of the community. Work with business partners and funders to recognize the strengths of smaller, community-based organizations, and support them through grant programs and/or technical assistance. Similarly, pay attention to the training needs of city staff. Improve effectiveness by increasing staff's ability to meet and work with citizens and to prioritize their work consistent with the city's children, youth, and families agenda. Also consider whether some re-designation of staff responsibilities might better target available resources.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

VI. Conclusion

Because few cities have the necessary funds to meet the full range of needs or even to control the policy agenda relating to children, youth, and families, officials are thinking more broadly and creatively about the roles they can play to stimulate and support community-wide collaborations. Increasingly, municipal leaders are finding they have the authority and the visibility to influence the direction of policy-making on these issues and to push things forward.

A Boston official we spoke with said she frequently reminds citizens, community partners, and her own staff that "the role of government is to convene, coordinate, and identify resources."

"We don't say, 'This is ours,'" the official continued. "Instead, we say, 'How can we help?' We've learned that as partners we can exert just as much weight, influence, and control as we can by being in control."

New Ways: Multiple Roles for City Leaders

The range of opportunities for municipal leadership in community-wide collaborations is surprisingly broad. In addition to convening groups and coordinating local efforts, city officials - including mayors, council members, and key agency staff - can play important roles as advocates, facilitators, and funders of collaborative efforts on behalf of children and families. Here are some examples of how cities are assuming each of these roles to build bridges throughout their communities:

- **As advocates, city officials can use the bully pulpit.** In Columbus, the Mayor used his recent State of the City speech to advocate on behalf of public schools and to call for additional community support.

  Watertown's 16-department government does not have a Department of Children and Families. Nevertheless, the mayor calls attention to youth issues, in part, by "getting out into the community and frequently spending time in classrooms with students, teaching them about government and giving them some perspective on the importance of government in their lives."

- **As conveners, city officials can bring the right people to the table and encourage participation by a broader array of community groups.** When Tempe officials saw welfare reform approaching, they realized that the business community had no idea of the role it would have to play in hiring and training former welfare recipients. The city's human services planning agency, Tempe Community Council, brought the Chamber of Commerce and the faith community together to give them information and establish connections. As a result, people making the transition from welfare to work were placed more quickly in settings that matched their skills to what employers needed.

  Officials in Tulsa recently cosponsored an education summit to learn what employers expect from high school graduates. The event was designed to involve more business leaders in education issues, as well as to identify ways to improve young people's transition from school to work.

- **As coordinators, city officials can reduce duplication and target resources where they can have the greatest impact.** City agencies in Boston seldom provide direct services. Instead, city officials work with community agencies to develop an effective plan that is then managed by community partners. The city recently led an 18-month effort to plan strategies aimed at supporting 14- to 20-year-olds. The strategies include mentoring, employment and training. As part of the process, nonprofit organizations compete for funds by showing how they plan to address specific outcomes regarding attendance,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

achievement, and violence and substance abuse prevention.

- **As facilitators, city officials can identify resources, provide technical assistance, and create conditions for more effective action.** In Philadelphia, city government has used available resources to help expand and support the number of family centers and after-school programs. Staff assistance to collaborative community boards that oversee the city's 19 family centers is focused on helping the boards conduct their own need assessments. The city also identifies funding sources that can be tapped to meet community requests.

  Savannah's community collaborative, the Youth Futures Authority, received Rockefeller Foundation funding for a Neighborhood Improvement Association. Similar to a community development organization, the NIA builds the capacity of local communities to solve problems. In addition, city staff assists citizen groups in making neighborhood redevelopment plans. To encourage citizen participation and support, the city staff provides technical support at a pace comfortable to the neighborhood.

- **As funders, city officials can provide both dollars and in-kind support.** Although cities are frequently not the primary source of funding for children, youth, and family services, they make substantial contributions of both money and in-kind resources. The City of Rochester contributes $100,000 annually to the community's Change Initiative, a collaborative effort to coordinate and decentralize the delivery of human services through the public schools. The city's contribution is used primarily for administrative staff. Other partners include United Way, county government, the schools and community organizations.

  In Iowa City, the city combines general fund and Community Development Block Grant dollars to provide financial support to many nonprofit. As part of its Aid to Agencies initiative, the city administers the program and coordinates with the United Way, the city of Coralville, and Johnson County so agencies can apply for public funding sources through a single review process.

Meeting a Growing Challenge

The life chances of American children and their families have never seemed brighter. National and state-level data show key measures of child well-being moving in the right direction. Infant mortality, teen pregnancy rates, and welfare enrollments are on the decline. More children are being immunized, attending preschool, and graduating from high school.[19] This is all good news to be sure, and the result, in part, of the diligent work of municipal governments and their community partners.

But the voices heard in this report are clear: many children and families are not sharing in this progress. Across the country, 13 percent of American children from urban, suburban and rural areas are growing up in families with four or more serious risk factors, including poverty status, poor educational attainment, unemployment, lack of health insurance, welfare status, or absence of a parent.[20]

City officials know that they continue to face a major, and in some respects, a growing challenge. Today's problems facing children and families often are complex and interrelated, and therefore less easily addressed by narrow programs or the interventions of a single agency. For these reasons, cities are beginning to search for new ways of taking action. They are acting as advocates, conveners, coordinators, facilitators, and funders to create and support crosscutting, community-wide collaborations. As these expanded forms of municipal leadership evolve and spread from community to community across the country, cities will have the opportunity to build on recent gains for children and families and to ensure that they are broadly shared in the years ahead.

End Notes

[1] Emily Stern, The State of America's Cities: The Sixteenth Annual Opinion Survey of Municipal Elected Officials. Washington, D.C.: National League of Cities, 2000.
[2] Judith Meyers and John E. Kyle, The Makings of a Family-Friendly City and Municipal Government's Role: Views of City Leaders. Washington, D.C.: National League of Cities, 1998.
[3] Jack Jennings and Diane Stark Rentner, "Youth and School Reform" in The Forgotten Half Revisited: American Youth and Young Families, 1998-2008. Edited by Samuel Halperin. Washington, D.C: American Youth Policy Forum, 1998.
[4] Ven Knox, "Undoing Institutional Racism." Speech to Minority Executive Directors Coalition, Seattle, Wash. July 21, 1999.
[5] Afterschool Alert Poll Report. A Report of Findings from the 1999 Mott Foundation/JC Penney Survey on Afterschool Programs, Flint, Mich.: Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 2000. Available at www.mott.org.
[6] John M. Berry, "This Time, Boom Benefits the Poor," The Washington Post, February 11, 2000, p. A14.
[7] Bernstein, Jared, Elizabeth Mc Nichol et al. Pulling Apart: A State by State Analysis of Income Trends. Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Economic Policy Institute, 2000.
[8] Herbert L. Green, Jr. The Impacts of Welfare Reform in America's Cities and Towns. Washington, D.C.: National League of Cities, June 1995.
[9] Mark H. Greenberg. Beyond Welfare: New Opportunities to Use TANF To Help Low-Income Families. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Law and Social Policy, July 1999. Available at www.clasp.org.
[10] The Future of Children, Executive Summary, "Welfare to Work." V. 7, No.1, Spring 1997.
[11] The Future of Children.
[12] What Every Educator Should Know . . . About the Changing Social Policy Landscape and Efforts to Ensure Student Success. Washington, D.C.: Council of Chief State School Officers, 1998.
[13] Out of Reach, Washington, D.C.: National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1999. Available at www.nlihc.org.
[14] The Future of Children.
[15] The Community Agenda. Vol. 2, No.1, Summer 1999. Available at www.togetherwecan.org.
[16] Judith Meyers and John E. Kyle, Critical Needs, Critical Choices: A Survey on Children and Families in America's Cities. Washington, D.C.: National League of Cities, 1996.
[17] Emily Stern.
[18] New Directions for Children and Families: Financing Municipal Policies and Programs for Children and Youth. Washington, D.C.: National League of Cities, 1997.
[19] Kids Count Data Book: 1999. Baltimore, Md.: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999. Available at www.aecf.org.
[20] Kids Count, p. 10

Notes

NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, & Families

REGISTER NOW!

___ **YES, I would like to register with the Institute** to receive periodic e-mail updates, immediate notice of new Institute publications or resources, and invitations to participate in special Institute meetings and activities.

I am particularly interested in the following ***issue areas*** (check all that apply):

___ youth development
___ education
___ child care/early education development
___ the protection of children
___ family economic security
___ other (please name) _____

Within these issue areas, are there ***specific topics*** on which you would like to receive information and/or assistance? Please list or describe briefly:

_____

_____

Are there ***successful youth, education, and/or families programs*** that you would like to share with the Institute? If so, please describe briefly and include the name and phone number of a contact person for each program.

1. _____
2. _____

Your Name _____
Title _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ Fax _____ E-Mail _____

FAX COMPLETED FORM to John E. Kyle at 202/626-3043.
Or, mail to him at NLC, 1301 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20004.
For information, phone 202/626-3039 or e-mail <kyle@nlc.org>.

National League of Cities

Institute for Youth,
Education, and Families

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004-1763
(202) 626-3000
www.nlc.org

BEST COPY AVAILABLE